



UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE *Southern District of New York*

U.S. ATTORNEY PREET BHARARA

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Tuesday, April 15, 2013
<http://www.justice.gov/usao/nys>

CONTACT: U.S. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
Ellen Davis, Julie Bolcer,
Jerika Richardson, Jennifer Queliz
(212) 637-2600

FBI
Martin Feely, Jim Margolin,
J. Peter Donald, Kelly Langmesser,
Adrienne Senatore
(212) 384-2100

MANHATTAN U.S. ATTORNEY AND FBI ASSISTANT DIRECTOR-IN-CHARGE ANNOUNCE KIDNAPPING CONSPIRACY CHARGES AGAINST MASSACHUSETTS VETERANS AFFAIRS POLICE CHIEF AND FORMER NEW YORK CITY HIGH SCHOOL LIBRARIAN

Defendants Allegedly Planned the Abduction, Rape, Torture, and Murder of Multiple Victims

Preet Bharara, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, and George Venizelos, the Assistant Director-in-Charge of the New York Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation ("FBI"), today announced the arrests of RICHARD MELTZ, Chief of Police for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, for the Bedford, Massachusetts Veteran Affairs Medical Center, and ROBERT CHRISTOPHER ASCH, a former high school librarian, for conspiracy to kidnap, torture, rape, and kill women and children. MELTZ was arrested yesterday afternoon and ASCH was arrested this morning by special agents of the FBI. MELTZ and ASCH will be presented today before U.S. Magistrate Judge James C. Francis IV in Manhattan federal court.

Manhattan U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara said: "The bone-chilling conduct alleged in this complaint is a chronicle of sadism and depravity that includes the defendants' very real steps to carry out their plans to kidnap, torture, rape, and kill the women and children they targeted. As alleged, Richard Meltz and Robert Christopher Asch assiduously planned their plot in detailed conversations and alternately served as advisors and facilitators of the plan – Meltz provided 'strategic advice' and Asch conducted surveillance, and provided supplies including leather ties, a sleeping agent, instruments of torture, and a taser gun. The only thing that stood between these alleged kidnappers and their horrifying plot was the outstanding investigative teamwork of the FBI and the prosecutors in this Office."

FBI Assistant Director-in-Charge George Venizelos said: "As alleged, both of these defendants took affirmative steps to carry out the conspiracy to kidnap and torture women. Their actions were not confined to talking about these ghoulish plans. They acquired the tools to accomplish the deed, including a taser and the chemical means to anesthetize their victims. And

they made detailed plans to use these instruments – plans that were foiled by the FBI’s intervention.”

According to the Complaint filed today in Manhattan federal court:

Between 2011 and October 2012, MELTZ, ASCH, and a co-conspirator, Michael Vanhise, who was previously indicted on kidnapping conspiracy charges, engaged in a series of electronic mail (“e-mail”) and instant message communications during which they discussed and planned in great detail the kidnapping, torture, and murder of women. In October 2012, FBI agents became aware of these communications. Specifically, they learned that Vanhise was sending e-mail and instant messages from various computers to solicit individuals, including MELTZ and ASCH, to kidnap, rape, and kill his wife, his sister-in-law, her children and his step-daughter. Vanhise eventually met with FBI agents, and told them that he sent MELTZ and ASCH photographs of his sister-in-law and her minor children. MELTZ and ASCH both expressed interest in kidnapping the proposed victims, and Vanhise provided MELTZ and ASCH with a location that was in close proximity to the kidnapping targets’ actual home address. In an e-mail exchange between MELTZ and Vanhise about this plan, MELTZ wrote: “we go over there she know you let’s [sic.]us in we choke her out tie her up throw her in the back of your car take her someplace and [rape and torture her].”

In October 2012, an FBI agent working in an undercover capacity (“UC-1”) contacted ASCH online and began discussions about kidnapping a woman, who, unbeknownst to the defendants, was also actually an FBI undercover agent (“UC-3”). UC-1 and ASCH met on a number of occasions in Manhattan, and during one such meeting on March 13, 2013, ASCH provided UC-1 with a bag of materials to be used during the kidnapping and torture of UC-3, including a ski mask, hypodermic needles, leather ties, chrome forceps, a three-page gun show itinerary, documents relating to a “leg-spreader” and “dental retractor” that ASCH claimed to have purchased, and the liquid form of doxepin hydrochloride, commonly used as a sleep agent. During the same meeting, ASCH, along with UC-1 and another FBI agent acting in an undercover capacity (“UC-2”), conducted surveillance of UC-3, the intended victim, as she left her purported work place. ASCH, upon viewing UC-3, said, “She has to die.”

ASCH also introduced UC-1 to MELTZ, who participated in multiple conversations with both UC-1 and ASCH about the conspiracy’s objective to kidnap and commit acts of violence against women. For example, after MELTZ and ASCH discussed the widespread availability of stun guns in gun shops in New Hampshire, where MELTZ lived, and at gun shows in Pennsylvania, and MELTZ provided advice about the use of a stun gun in the commission of the kidnapping offense, ASCH traveled from New York to Pennsylvania to attend a gun show and purchased a high-voltage taser gun.

Throughout this investigation, the FBI intercepted numerous phone calls during which MELTZ provided advice, information, and assistance to ASCH on how to avoid detection and minimize the risks associated with abducting and murdering a woman. Examples of the techniques suggested by MELTZ include the avoidance of toll roads, using rental cars, paying for “tools” in cash, looking for victims in desolate areas who are engaged in other activities (such as talking on the phone), abducting victims at night, and using disguises when first approaching a potential victim.

On April 14, 2013, MELTZ met with UC-1 at a location in New Jersey. This meeting was recorded and observed by FBI agents. At the meeting, MELTZ and UC-1 discussed the

kidnapping and murder of UC-3. MELTZ advised UC-1 on how best to dispose of UC-3's body, including how to transport it from the crime scene to a desolate location in the woods in upstate New York. MELTZ told UC-1 that given the weather at the time of year, if UC-3's body were left in the woods, wild animals would likely find and destroy it before law enforcement could find it.

On April 15, 2013, ASCH met UC-1 in lower Manhattan to conduct surveillance of UC-3. UC-1 and ASCH previously had discussed ASCH giving UC-1 the tools ASCH had gathered to use for the kidnapping, so that UC-1 could take them to the location where UC-3 was to be brought following her abduction. ASCH brought to the April 15 meeting two bags of tools intended to be used in the kidnapping, rape, torture, and murder of UC-3, including but not limited to a taser gun, rope, a meat hammer, duct tape, gloves, cleaning supplies, zip ties, a dental retractor, two speculums, 12-inch skewers, pliers, a wireless modem, and a leg spreader.

* * *

ASCH, 60, of Manhattan, and MELTZ, 65, of Stanhope, New Jersey, and Nashua, New Hampshire, are each charged with one count of conspiracy to commit kidnapping, which carries a maximum sentence of life in prison, and a maximum fine of \$250,000, or twice the gross gain or gross loss from the offense.

Mr. Bharara praised the outstanding investigative work of the FBI. He also thanked the New Jersey State Police. Mr. Bharara added that the investigation is continuing.

This case is being handled by the Office's Violent Crimes Unit. Assistant United States Attorneys Hadassa Waxman and Brooke E. Cucinella are in charge of the prosecution.

The charges contained in the Complaint and the Indictment against Vanhise are merely accusations, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.